

except a singleness of purpose not all that different,
the enormous cunning and intelligence of the counterfeiters

notwithstanding, from the desire for corn, say, on the part
of the goose Chipper, who appears in photo after photo
showing Dawson and Woodward hard at work in the gravel pit
alongside a black dog, unidentified, and their laborer,
the ironically-named "Venus" Hargreaves, Christian name
unknown.

ANACHARSIS CLOOTS

The lawn of the Gamma Phi Beta House
is crowded with eager young women
among whom I am making my way
when a frat boy in a "Rush Security" t-shirt
asks me to walk on the other side of the street,
tells me to "respect the university."
Respect the university?
In my own mind, I am the university:
I teach, do research,
serve on important committees.
For a moment I cock my head
to one side like a dog
and then I take his meaning:
he is afraid I will force myself on the virgins
that he and his brothers
have reserved for their own use.
They are all white, the virgins.
I wonder how it would be
to see some red
on this portrait of young womanhood,
maybe some lemon or ocher,
not to mention the rich hues
of the African-American palette:
freckly sunny yellow, cafe au lait,
grape-purple black.
And I think of Melville, of Moby-Dick,
of Ishmael calling his shipmates,
who are of every hue and nationality,
an "Anacharsis Cloots delegation"
after the French Revolutionary
who spent his fortune
for the advancement of the humanitarian ideals
to which he was fanatically devoted,
at one point bringing to the National Assembly
a delegation of foreigners
as "ambassadors of the human race."
He was sincere but eccentric —
in the end, too eccentric for Monsieur Robespierre
and the other members of the Committee of Public Safety.

The frat boy notices that I am still hanging around,
so he scowls and confers with his bro,
but by now the young women are all inside
the Gamma Phi Beta house anyway,
safe from whatever it is that threatens them.
Anacharsis Cloots was my kind of guy,
silly but dangerous;
no wonder they cut off his head.

A SYLLABUS OF ERRORS

A four-year-old, no relative though one of my acquaintance,
yet barely, confides that he "wishes women had penises"
and, when asked why, replies "so I can look at them"
and refuses to or, more strictly, does not elaborate,

four-year-olds having scant powers of elaboration,
thus rendering the matter of refusal immaterial
and leaving me to fill a silence that is awkward,
if only for one of us, and to think of Socrates,

said to have computed that the life of the philosopher
is 729 times more pleasurable than that of the tyrant,
even though it has never been supposed that either of them,
the one in the fullness of his joy

and the other in the poverty of his,
derived either a jot or tittle of gratification more or
less from the prospect of women having penises
which they, in turn, could look at,

and I think as well of humanistic psychologist Abraham
Maslow
who observed that "love at its best
is also a kind of silly thing,"
and of Pius IX, who in 1864 published his Syllabus of
Errors.

Whose life could not bear that title?

Grown men in the throes of orgasm see themselves
wielding a flaming sword as armies clash on a sunny hillside
and a choir bellows the "Hallelujah Chorus,"

even though in reality the deed itself is often better
likened

to the asthmatic wheeze of a bicycle horn.
I have heard these same men say, "I like a woman wif a big
butt!"

and then again, less for emphasis than for
self-aggrandizement